

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 11

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE
27 JULY 1981

How a Former Spy Minds His Business

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By Bill Wallace

Alvin Buckelew is a spy who came in from the cold — and every Tuesday afternoon, he gives students at Golden Gate University a guided tour through the chilly realm that he used to call home.

Titled "The CIA and KGB: The Management of Modern Intelligence Operations," Buckelew's course is part of the curriculum in the growing field of security management and offers a glimpse into the intrigue-ridden world of moles, double agents, counterspies and covert operators.

"I wanted to destroy some of the myths which are associated with intelligence, including the myth of the James Bonds, exotic weapons and the purse that never seems to go empty," the soft-spoken Buckelew said in a recent interview.

"Intelligence work doesn't consist of globetrotting to Berlin and Vienna, gunbattles and liaisons with beautiful, mysterious women... A lot of intelligence activity is accomplished in such romantic spots as isolated villages in Laos where a man is rich if he owns two goats."

Buckelew was a spy for the CIA and Army intelligence from 1956 until 1972. He spent four years in Latin America and 12 years in Asia, including a tour of duty in Vietnam, running networks of refugees and other foreign nationals as undercover agents, and engaging in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist activities.

Buckelew now heads a local-specialized security management firm, and is active in the San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

In his course, Buckelew examines the structure of intelligence agencies, the morality of spying, the need for intelligence collection in the U.S. — and stresses the strength and effectiveness of the KGB.

Although Russian spies are frequently caricatured in films and novels as thickly-accented men in trench coats plotting assassinations, most KGB agents actually spend their time trying to ferret out information about business, agriculture and industrial processes, he said.

"Around the Bay Area, for example, the KGB is very interested in what's going on in the Silicon Valley," Buckelew said. "We recently had a case where an identified KGB agent was linked to the disappearance of thousands of integrated circuits from the Intel Corporation."

As for the CIA, it and other U.S. intelligence services are "probably more technologically advanced than any other agencies in the world," Buckelew said.

"But in the area of HUMINT, or human intelligence, the kind of information gathered through networks of agents, we've suffered irreparable damage as a result of the Congressional hearings into intelligence abuses in the early 1970s."

Buckelew acknowledged that abuses by the CIA disclosed in congressional investigations showed that "some bad things were done, there's no question about it."

"But intelligence is a game you can't play according to Marquis de Queensbury rules. It is a dirty business," he insisted.

Buckelew said that following the congressional hearings into foreign and domestic spying activities in the 1970s, there was a backlash against U.S. espionage

operations which drove many top intelligence officers into early retirement.

He counts himself among its victims, noting that when he retired from intelligence work in 1972, he had a straight "A" academic average in college and scored very high on the law school entrance board, but found it impossible to get into law school.

After being rejected for a job with a local governmental agency because of his intelligence background, Buckelew set up Management Information Research Associates, Inc., a five-man company which he describes as "specializing in information collection for multinational corporations."

Like other corporate security firms, Buckelew's outfit does background checks, industrial espionage and theft investigations and similar types of industrial sleuthing.

Last year his company successfully investigated the theft of a half-million dollars worth of granulated gold from a South San Francisco metal refinery.

Just a few years ago, inviting a former spy to lecture on intelligence at a college or university campus would have been the easiest way to spark a student riot.

When recruiters from U.S. intelligence services appeared at the University of California campuses at Davis, Los Angeles and San Diego in the early 1970s, they were greeted by hundreds of student demonstrators and picketers.

Today, however, spokesmen for the CIA and other U.S. spy agencies say the intelligence community is making a public relations comeback on campus.

According to Buckelew, "all sorts of students" have been attending his course and most of them seem favorably disposed toward the